IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT THERE IS A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF CANADA'S COMPLEX COLONIAL HISTORY

SENATOR MARGARET DAWN ANDERSON

Senator Margaret Dawn Anderson has represented the Northwest Territories in the Senate of Canada since December 2018. She is a proud Inuvialuk and mother of five. She was born and raised on the shores of the Arctic Ocean in Tuktoyaktuk. Anderson has a bachelor's degree in child and youth care from the University of Victoria and spent more than 20 years as a senior public servant in the NWT, including as Director of Community Justice and Policing. In 2021, Sen. Anderson led the Senate's passage of Bill C-8, which revised Canada's Oath of Citizenship to include reference to Aboriginal and treaty rights, requiring all new citizens to declare: "I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada, including the Constitution, which recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples." Sen. Anderson later witnessed the first citizenship ceremony incorporating the new phrasing in June 2021, when Citizenship Judge Suzanne Carrière (Canada's first Métis and first Indigenous citizenship judge) presided over the administering of the reworded oath for 31 new Canadians. The following is an edited transcript of an interview with Sen. Anderson about the change to the Oath of Citizenship, the challenge of educating all Canadians – including newcomers – about the history of Indigenous peoples on these lands, and the tensions and injustices experienced by Inuit communities around issues of Canadian citizenship and identity.

Sen. Dawn Anderson spoke with Randy Boswell, guest editor of this edition of Canadian Issues*, in March 2024*

Canadian citizenship is typically understood in positive terms as a credential, a marker of identity that is a privilege to possess. That has not always been the viewpoint expressed by Indigenous people in this country. Convincing Indigenous people to become, quote, 'full-fledged' Canadian citizens has

been viewed by some Indigenous people at different times as part of the Canadian state's Indigenous assimilation project. Indigenous leaders have long advocated for a 'citizen-plus' model in which Aboriginal and Treaty rights are respected and protected, along with the rights and benefits that Canadian citizenship bestows. Can you talk about the compatibility and tensions involved in being both a Canadian citizen and a member of an Indigenous nation in Canada?

You have to go back in history. When looking at the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, it's important to understand your history with Canada. I'll speak from the Inuit perspective, because that's what I'm familiar with. Now, to begin with, we were sold to Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company for $300,000, and a certain percentage of arable lands. We were unaware we were being sold, or bought, or owned by any entity, or 'dominion.' And that I think, in and of itself, speaks to the disconnection of Canada or a country with a people that live on these lands – that lived on these lands before they came, that survived on these lands, that thrived on these lands. So first, you have that aspect. But you also have the impacts of colonialism through the whalers, through the bringing of disease, through the imposition of the Roman Catholic church, the Anglican church. Then you have the case where Canada had instructed Quebec that they were responsible for all Inuit, which at the time, I don't think they really defined as Inuit. And Quebec, taking them to court, and the Supreme Court coming back with a ruling that Canada is responsible for the Inuit. And Canada not recognizing the diversity of (Inuit) and then putting them in under the Indian Act – not distinguishing the difference between the First Nations peoples and the Inuit. Then came the imposition of residential schools, which started in the late 1890s, I think in my area – taking away people's children and placing them in a school. And then you have the imposition of the Eskimo identification program that then saw all of Canada divided into two regions, 12 districts. So, the region I'm from came under the Western Arctic. So there was the west and the east, though I fell under the West, and Tuktoyaktuk came under Western Arctic region number 3.

My grandparents then became numbers. Literally, my daduk (grandfather) became W3–776. My nanuk (grandmother) became W3–777. My mother became W3–779. So, then this goes on, until 1968, when Canada has now decided: Oh, perhaps they should have names. Now that number was your distinguishing identifier. That's how your mail came. That's how you were identified. And now you have a name. In our culture, we only had Inuk, or Inuit names – no first name, no last name. My mother had five Inuk names. So, now they've taken your traditional (name away). She somehow became Sarah Martha Nasogaluak, which was an anglicized version of my daduk or my grandfather's name.

So we're only at 1968. At some point, my mom – because she married a non-Indigenous man – lost her status. Yet, non-Indigenous women marrying Indigenous men were getting status, right? So my mother did not get her status back until 1977, in and about there. She had lost it, and then she got it back. And then you have a government, at some point between 1952 and 1962, if I recall, correctly, that created an Eskimo committee in the House of Commons. There were no Eskimo Inuit members on that committee; there were clergy, there was the Hudson's Bay Company, there was the fed-

eral government – but no one who was directly impacted by the legislation that was being made. So, you have all this very complex colonial-compounded harmful history that continues to resonate in my area... The history is very complex. I don't think Canadians – never mind immigrants who come into Canada – understand this history. And the history I'm speaking of is for a select population – the Western Arctic Inuit. The Eastern Arctic has their own stories. So, I think that it's really important that the history not be diminished. I think it is being diminished. I think that quite often when apologies are done, they think, 'Oh, it's done and it's over.' But the fact remains that it's still problematic. There are still issues. Just because an apology has been done does not mean the steps have been taken to rectify that issue. And these issues have continued decade after decade, and have not fully been resolved. So, I think it's really important that there is a greater understanding of Canada's complex colonial history with Indigenous peoples by region, and the fact that Canada sees fit to lump us into Inuit, First Nations and Métis, which is nowhere near as descriptive of the diversity of the people, their cultures, their traditions, their lands, and their own individual experiences. Yes. Right. Because we each have a different history with Canada. And most of it is not a good history. I mean, you don't have to look very far with First Nations and see one community that's still on its 29th year of boil-water advisory. I think that there needs to be a greater understanding, and more efforts put into, changing the narrative. I'm a huge collector of historical documents. And I do collect a lot of government books from both the US and Canada. And throughout these books over 200–250 years, there's a constant narrative about Indian people – which we were lumped in with – that they're lazy, don't want to work; that when alcohol was introduced, they're all have drinking problems, you know, that they need to conform to the ways of the white or non-Indigenous world. And that narrative has not changed. And that's problematic.

You're describing an incredibly fraught history that cuts across literally hundreds of individual nations, including the multitude of Inuit communities across the North. How does that play out in having a sense of identity of being 'Canadian'? That's something many of us are born into – a sense of identity that's relatively clear. I take it that sort of clarity of identity isn't available in the same way.

Growing up, I would never have identified as Canadian. My first identity is that I was an Inuk. That's my identity. That's who I am. To give you example, when my daughter was quite young, I believe around eight or nine, her dad – who was very much Canadian – had a conversation with her and proceeded to tell her she was Canadian. Well, she told him very clearly that she's not Canadian, that she is Indigenous, that Indigenous peoples were on these lands first, that she identifies as Indigenous, and not as Canadian. And I think when you're Indigenous, and you grow up in a culture – a culture that still is rooted in tradition, language, a system that is aligned with our historical ways of living, such as consensus government – that there is a sense of belonging and ownership to the group that you come from. And to me, that's the Inuvialuit. That's how I identify. The only time I identify as Canadian is on a form when I'm travelling. I would never say, 'I'm Canadian.' I always say, 'I'm Inuk.' Inuk will always come first out of my mouth. I think that, in a sense, that with Canada laying claim over us as

a people – without us being active participants in that decision-making – that, quite often, is a disconnect. For us, as Indigenous peoples on what is our traditional land – a land that we knew before it was called Canada – I think it's a disservice to my ancestors to do that. My ancestors travelled, were nomadic. They travelled through Alaska, into the Yukon, into the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. They roamed freely. The identification of Canada becomes a very restrictive position in my opinion. I clearly identify as Inuk before I would say I was Canadian.

Some would say the whole process of reconciliation is partly aimed at creating a situation where Indigenous people on these lands might feel more fully Canadian. It doesn't sound like you would put it that way.

For me, reconciliation is not to feel more fully Canadian. Reconciliation for me means that Canada will be making amends for the wrongs that Canada has done to us as Indigenous peoples. It means that there's concrete steps that are taken to do that. I personally do not see reconciliation as a means for me to identify as a Canadian. That's probably one of the furthest things from my thought when it comes to reconciliation. Reconciliation means that Canada owns up to its wrongs.

Canadian citizenship is something that is craved by many people from different parts of the world. They want to become Canadians. Previously these newcomers made a pledge to identify with and honour this country, including its Queen (now King). But you helped lead the push to change that Oath of Citizenship, to incorporate a clear reference to the inherent Aboriginal and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples. Can you describe why you felt that was important to do?

I think any opportunity to provide education and inform individuals who are non-Indigenous about the Indigenous history of Canada is integral. It's important for all individuals – not just the ones that are coming into Canada, but for those in Canada already – to understand the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, to gain an understanding and a commonality with the people that live on these lands, and not base their opinions and their decisions on narratives that are negative, that are often heard out in public, that have been passed through the generations. I think it's important to recognize, honour, the diversity of the Indigenous peoples that live on these lands and respect that. I find quite often that Canadians themselves do not know the history of Indigenous peoples on these lands. And that in and of itself is hugely problematic. So any opportunity to be able to create a situation where we can educate and fully inform individuals about Indigenous peoples, I think, is vitally important.

What does it mean to you, personally, to have steered that legislation successfully through Parliament – and to create that historic moment, three years ago almost, when the oath was actually changed?

I don't know if it's me personally. In my culture, it's not about yourself. It's always about the collective. It's about where you come from, who you represent. It's about honouring. And doing this is a way of honoring my nanuk, my daduk (grandparents) – the culture that I come from, the community that I come from. It's a way of ensuring that I do my part – a part of a bigger picture – to ensure that we right wrongs. That we – that my nanuk, and my

daduk and my mother, who suffered a lot under the colonial system – that there is some form of repair.

It's not personal. It's a collective history – not even just for my culture, but for Indigenous peoples. I think it's important that to honour and respect the wishes (of Indigenous people), and this came out of a Truth and Reconciliation call to action. So it's important to honour that. So it's not so much personal as it as it is a professional and cultural responsibility.

In one of your speeches – in the discussion on this legislation – you stated the following: "Until the story of life in Canada, as aboriginal people know it, finds a place in all Canadians' knowledge of their past, the wounds from historical violence and neglect will continue to fester." How close or how far do you feel that this country's population – both the newcomers arriving here, and those who've been lifelong residents, like myself and my parents – are from achieving the level of knowledge about Canada's past that would reassure Indigenous people that we've been educated?

A visual comes to mind when you're saying this. I come from Tuktoyaktuk. And a lot of tourists come, and they dip their toe in the Arctic Ocean. So the visual that comes to mind is: You have this toe, let's say, which is Canada. Well, it's dipped. That's it. It's dipped in this vast Arctic Ocean. And maybe there's a couple of ripples in it. What needs to happen is they need to jump in. They need to go out into the middle of that ocean. They need to put an effort into going out, they need to experience and understand how our history has continued to be profoundly impacted by the wrongs that have happened and continue to happen...

If you go back and look at my speeches, one of the things I'll constantly speak to is equity and equality. There is no equity and equality between southern Canada and any of the three territories. I'll give you a clear example... We still have chief firearms officers residing in the south for all three territories... We don't have language rights on our lands... So, these injustices continue, despite the TRC calls to action, despite UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), despite historical treaties, land claim agreements, modern treaties, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for justice, calls to action. And in the face of the government talking about reconciliation, these wrongdoings continue at a high rate. It's present in almost every bill I deal with.

When I have national groups come to my office, my first question is: Do you have representatives from any of the territories? Over 90 per cent do not. Right. So how do you purport to be national, when you have no representation from any of the territories? So it's a huge issue...

Part of the problem with immigration is that the booklet [a new immigration guidebook to replace 2012's *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*] was supposed to come, but has not come yet. So the information contained in this (current guidebook) is problematic information. It's old information; it in no way now reflects the new oath in the manner that it should... I don't want to see this just being a checkmark – 'Oh, we've accomplished this TRC call to action.' No, you have not. You've accomplished getting the oath in there. Have you accomplished the significant piece that accompanies this as a whole? No, you have not. So, in my opinion, the obligation by Canada has not yet been met...

What are some of the specific things that you are hoping for in the *Discover Canada* document that the government is said to be preparing?

My hope is that I get to review it before it becomes public. I believe that there needs to be greater representation of Indigenous peoples in Canada, perhaps a map that outlines the Indigenous groups – where they live – that clears up the misguided belief that we all live on reserves, that there's a clear, definitive delineation between reserve lands, land claim agreements, historic agreements, and that Canada takes more ownership for their wrongdoings than they have... I definitely think a map that that clearly shows where people live, that speaks to that diversity of languages – that Canada is not just French and English. (It should) speak to the importance of our Indigenous languages, as well... I find that the current (guide) seems to erode our existence, actually minimize our existence, and puts it down to these unimportant little facts that are listed in the citizenship book.

And you've spoken about the categorization of Indigenous peoples in Canada as 'First Nations Inuit, Métis' as, obviously, a great generalization.

I think it further just diminishes Indigenous people, that it continues to be a form of assimilation of Indigenous people, that it minimizes our importance on the land that is Canada.

The Oath of Citizenship is just one tiny thing – as you put it, a 'toe in the ocean,' a very good analogy. So where else does it need to continue, this educating of the population about the history of indigenous peoples on this land and all of the injustices that flowed?

I think in every aspect. Education. Health. I think health is a huge issue for us as Indigenous peoples. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the non-insured health benefits that cover Inuit and First Nations. Non-insured health benefits is a quagmire of rules, legislation – approval for which comes from the south, as well. Our approvals come from Ottawa. There's pre-approvals for medication. We have people sharing puffers in communities. You have to get pre-approval for asthma medication, which could take 7, 14 days, 21 days, because we don't have hospitals, we have health centres. And we don't have pharmacies, just in certain locations, especially in the Beaufort Delta. Our people die 20 years younger than non-Indigenous peoples. And it's highly concerning. The education around that – really, there needs to be some education around that. Specifically with MAID (medical assistance in dying), it's hugely problematic the direction it's headed in... [*Sen. Anderson has previously highlighted how the systemic inequalities in health care and mental health services faced by many Indigenous people can place them in more vulnerable situations in relation to MAID decisions*].

And people seem to think, you know, we can just pop in an EV and a heat pump, and that'll bring down (emissions), but they have no concept of the geographic challenges we face – the weather challenges we face, the aging infrastructure we have. There seems to be a common refrain we hear about – 'Oh, the numbers don't warrant it' – which is hugely problematic. Yet, when there is an asset that Canada wants, we (in the North) become important, right? So, I think education in every area is central.

I think when a bill comes up in the House of Commons, and the Senate, instead of just using a

gender-analysis lens, there should be an Indigenous lens that is applied to these bills. I think that is really important. And I think that's how I look at all the bills when they come in.

Regarding the first ceremony that followed the change of the Oath of Citizenship. You were a witness to that. Can you describe your thoughts at that time? Did you feel like you were witnessing a significant moment? Or do you feel – as I think I'm beginning to gather – that you witnessed a one-millimetre advance in the cause?

This was during COVID-19, so it was all online – which created a disconnect in some ways. The part I found very heartwarming, I would say, at some points we did get to speak to the citizens who were being sworn in. That was probably one of the most memorable pieces for me, was their excitement about the whole event. And I found that heartwarming. Being indigenous, I just don't have that same feeling. Yeah. My experiences are different with Canada. But (the new oath) was definitely a shift, I think, in the way Canada incorporated Indigenous peoples, which was good to see. I would like to know if that's continued – if they've changed that practice or if that was a one-off . . . ? When you have an opportunity – and for some, it may be their first time – but when they're interacting with someone who's Indigenous, that's important that there's a connection, that there is a sense of camaraderie, a sense of support, and welcoming. And I think for everyone it's important – and it's not just important for the immigrants, but it's important for us as Indigenous peoples to be part of that process. Because this is still our lands. We live on these lands. And I think you can start to build relationships. I think relationships are central and key to learning about each other.

You've described the legislative process and some of the bills that arrive without enough appreciation of history and the presence of Indigenous peoples, or even the existence of the territories. How do you feel in your day-to-day interactions on Parliament Hill, about the level of knowledge that you are seeking for Canadians to possess about the Indigenous 'compatriots'?

I can tell you that in my office, I have three very good staff. And I always add an Indigenous lens to every interaction – and not just bills. We have a lot of lobbyists. And when they come for meetings, we will always ensure we ask the question about inclusion of not just the territories but of Indigenous peoples in the work that they do. What does that mean? What does that look like? Why is that not happening? So, for us, it's a daily thing. It's actually not just a daily thing. It's a meeting-to-meeting thing. It's very much a part of how we work in our office. We've had to learn to do that. Because it's very clear to all of us in our office, that it is very much an overlooked aspect... So actually, I will go out of my way to meet with people who I know have no connection to Indigenous peoples on the land or no knowledge of the history, because I think it's a very important aspect to build into my conversations. It's a conversation we have every day. Sometimes we're repeating ourselves copiously in a day.

It sounds exhausting.

It is... At what point (can) we... stop educating, and someone has a responsibility to start educating themselves? I can't speak for anyone else, but definitely it is an ongoing issue.

I've actually traveled internationally a bit lately.

And the narrative that Canada puts out there is how well they treat Indigenous peoples. And what a great land this is for Indigenous peoples. Well, I'm Indigenous. And I can tell you that's not true – absolutely not true. And even as senators, there's a belief that you should be grateful, you're in your job and you were chosen. At what point is Canada grateful that you accepted the job, that you've agreed to put yourself out there to speak to some of these historical wrongs. Right? I've mentioned this to one of the ministers that as an Indigenous person, doing politics is very difficult. It's extremely hard, because your values, your morals, your whole sense of being is a collective being. And I say this, because we continue to carry on Inuk names. So my Inuk name is Paniyok. So growing up, I was never just me, I was also Paniyok[1]. I was recognized as her, I was acknowledged as her, I was gifted things as her. So you never grow up being just a singular unit, you grow up being a 'we', being a part of something greater than you are. And you have this whole sense that you have this responsibility – this greater responsibility. It doesn't come to you getting a promotion, a better job, better pay. It comes from the inherent sense of accountability, responsibility that you have to accomplish for the greater good of the collective.

1 Sen. Anderson later explained that her Inuk name honoured a community member named Paniyok: "My early recollections were of her daughter... calling me mom and gifting me items. I still have a gift given to me as a young child made of otter... Within my culture, naming of a child is a complex tradition. Names reflect what is important in our culture and this includes family, animals, spirits and the environment. A name/s are given to a newborn child usually by an elder. This may be decided by dreams or visions whereby an elder is visited by someone who has passed; this is seen as a sign to bestow a child with the name of the deceased. The name/s a child is given holds significant meaning. The child in turn is treated like their namesake/s. It is a tradition stemmed in remembrance and honour. In this respect, I am intrinsically linked to Paniyok, her life and family as well as all those before me who carry or carried the name Paniyok. In this context, I have never been an 'I'. I started out as a 'we'."